

Message Text

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11
ACTION NEA-10

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R 170636Z AUG 76
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7742

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 12018

FOLLOWING REPEAT CALCUTTA 1991 SENT ACTION NEW DELHI
INFO BOMBAY/MADRAS 13 AUG 76.

QUOTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 1991

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, PINT, IN
SUBJ: CONDITIONS IN WEST BENGAL DISTRICTS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: CENTRAL DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL--A
RICH AGRICULTURAL BELT--SEEM GENERALLY PROSPEROUS NOW,
ALTHOUGH THERE IS ANXIETY THAT SPARSE RAINS, ESPECIALLY
IN CENTRAL/NORTH, MAY HURT PRODUCTION. AT LEAST PARTS OF
TWENTY POINT PROGRAM ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED, BUT EXTENT OF
THEIR IMPACT ON EPOPLE OF DISTRICTS IS PROBABLY SLIGHT.
THIS YEAR THE TOP PRIORITY GOVERNMENT PROGRAM IS FAMILY
PLANNING, WHICH IS BEING PROMOTED THROUGH EXTENSION WORK,
NOT DIRECT COMPULSION. IMPRESSION RECEIVED FROM TALKING
WITH GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATORS, IS THAT THIS PART OF INDIA,
AT LEAST, IS TURNING MORE AND MORE INTO A "BUREAUCRATIC
STATE" IN WHICH POLITICAL LEADERS COUNT FOR LITTLE. WHILE
OFFICIAL RECEPTION GIVEN TO VISITING CONGEN OFFICER WAS
FRIENDLY, HE WAS GUARDED/TRAILED VIRTUALLY EVERY INCH OF
THE WAY--UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF WEST
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BENGAL. END SUMMARY.

2. THIS REPORT IS THE RESULT OF A TRIP MADE THROUGH THE DISTRICTS OF NADIA, MURSHIDABAD, BIRBHUM, AND BURDWAN IN WEST BENGAL BY ECON/COMMERCIAL OFFICER LIEBOWITZ ON AUGUST 9 THROUGH 11.

3. THE DISTRICTS OF NADIA, MURSHIDABAD, BIRBHUM, AND BURDWAN--NORTH OF CALCUTTA AND THE DAMODAR RIVER AND SOUTH OF THE GANGES--COMPRISE A RICH AGRICULTURAL BELT. ON THE EAST BANK OF THE HOOGLHY, THE PREDOMINANT CROPS IN MID-AUGUST ARE JUTE, SUGAR CANE, AND "AUS" RICE (HARVESTED IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER), WHILE "AMON" RICE (HARVESTED IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER) IS PREDOMINANT ON THE WEST BANK. MOST OF THIS FLAT, DELTAIC AREA PRESENTS A LUSH, GREEN PICTURE DURING THE MONSOON SEASON, ALTHOUGH THIS YEAR LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE EXPRESSING ANXIETY OVER THE RELATIVELY SPARSE RAINFALL THUS FAR. ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS IN NADIA, YIELDS OF AUS RICE AND JUTE WOULD BE SOME 15 PERCENT BELOW EXPECTATIONS BECAUSE OF INSUFFICIENT RAINFALL. THE JUTE CROP WILL NEVERTHELESS STILL BE GOOD BECAUSE JUTE WAS SOWN OVER A VERY WIDE AREA. ELSEWHERE, THERE WAS CONCERN THAT UNLESS THE MONSOON IMPROVED, RICE THAT WAS BEING TRANSPLANTED OR THAT SHOULD BE TRANSPLANTED IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS WOULD SUFFER.

3. AFTER THE SHARP RISE OF SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, PRICES HAVE MODERATED, ACCORDING TO LOCAL OFFICIALS. RICE REPORTEDLY COSTS FROM RS. 1.50 IN SOME RURAL AREAS TO RS. 2.20/2.40 IN THE DISTRICT TOWNS.

4. EVERYWHERE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS CLAIMED THAT SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE IN IMPLEMENTING THE TWENTY POINT PROGRAM. EVEN ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL FIGURES, HOWEVER, THE PROGRAMS CANNOT HAVE HAD MUCH IMPACT. IN NADIA, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH A TOTAL POPULATION OF 2.2 MILLION AND A RURAL POPULATION OF 1.8 MILLION, ABOUT 12,000 ACRES HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO 36,000 PEOPLE. IN MURSHIDABAD, 75,000 LANDLESS PEASANTS HAVE RECEIVED 25,000 ACRES. THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WERE PROUD OF THE HOMES BEING BUILT FOR THE PREVIOUSLY HOMELESS--SMALL, ONE-OR TWO-ROOM HUTS WITH TILE ROOFS AND MUD OR CANE WALLS, COSTING ABOUT RS. 600-700

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EACH. IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL INDIA, THE HOUSES SEEMED DECENT AND A REAL ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR THE GOVERNMENT. ONE SCEPTICAL POLICE OFFICER, HOWEVER, COMMENTED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THOSE RECEIVING HOUSES MERELY SOLD THEM TO OTHERS AND WENT BACK TO LIVING AS THEY HAD.

5. IT IS DIFFICULT TO GET A GOOD IMPRESSION OF THE SUCCESS OF THE ATTEMPT TO END RURAL INDEBTEDNESS AND ESTABLISH NEW

SOURCES OF CREDIT. IN ONE DISTRICT THE ADDITIONAL DISTRICT MAGISTRATE DESCRIBED HOW HE HAD TAKEN UP THE CASE OF A HEAVILY INDEBTED MAN AND SEEN THAT HE WAS FREED FROM HIS DEBTS, USING THIS CASE AS A MEANS OF PUBLICIZING THE NEW LAWS. LOCAL OFFICIALS GENERALLY SAID THEY EXPECTED COOPERATIVES, RATHER THAN BANKS, TO PROVIDE MOST OF THE NEW CREDIT. A DECISION HAS APPARENTLY BEEN TAKEN TO PROVIDE CONSUMER CREDIT, BUT THE DETAILS ARE STILL BEING WORKED OUT.

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7748

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 12018

6. ALL THE DISTRICTS MAGISTRATES SAID THEIR TOP PRIORITY IS NOW FAMILY PLANNING. THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN TARGETS TO REACH BY SEPTEMBER 30, AND ALTHOUGH THE PROGRAM HAS BEEN SLOW IN GETTING STARTED, EXPECT TO FULFILL THEM. THE OFFICIALS SAY THAT FINANCIAL INCENTIVES ARE OF SOME VALUE, BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTIVATING DEVICES ARE EXTENSION WORK AND THE SETTING OF STERILIZATION QUOTAS FOR VARIOUS OFFICIALS. ONE LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR CONCEDED THAT WHEN OFFICIALS WERE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO FULFILL QUOTAS, THEY MIGHT EXERT COERCION TO HAVE LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC PEOPLE STERILIZED. MOSLEMS HAVE APPARENTLY RESISTED STERILIZATION FOR FEAR THAT IT WOULD KEEP THE MINORITY COMMUNITY IN A MINORITY POSITION. ONE OFFICIAL SAID THAT INVOLVING LOCAL MOSLEM POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE CAMPAIGN BROUGHT ACCEPTANCE BY THE MOSLEM PEOPLE.

7. IF IMPRESSIONS OBTAINED FROM TALKING WITH AN ADMITTEDLY

BIASED SAMPLE IN A LIMITED AREA CAN BE EXTRAPOLATED TO THE COUNTRY AT LARGE, INDIA IS HEADING TO AN "ADMINISTRATIVE" OR "BUREAUCRATIC" STATE. DISTRICT OFFICIALS SEEM TO BE MORE THAN EVER SUPREME IN THEIR DOMAINS. THE TWENTY POINT AND SIMILAR PROGRAMS HAVE PROVIDED AND PUBLICIZED CLEAR GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE ADMINISTRATION. ALTHOUGH THEY FIND IT USEFUL TO HAVE THE SUPPORT OF LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMS, NONE PLACED ANY GREAT EMPHASIS ON SUCH POLITICAL GROUPS AS CONGRESS OR THE YOUTH CONGRESS. CONFIDENTIAL

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IN THE ONCE MUCH-VAUNTED SPHERE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT-- PANCHAYATS AND ZILA PARISCHADS--POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAS COMPLETELY BROKEN DOWN. THE ZILA PARISCHAD OF NADIA, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS BEEN DISMISSED FOR CORRUPTION, AND ITS AFFAIRS-- AS THOSE OF VIRTUALLY ALL MUNICIPALITIES IN WEST BENGAL-- PLACED IN THE HANDS OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE APPOINTEE. AS ONE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE SAID, "FRANKLY, LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN INDIA IS A FAILURE." THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATES AND THEIR STAFFS THINK THAT THE PEOPLE OF RURAL INDIA WANT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RUNNING A DISTRICT TO BE VESTED IN ONE MAN, TO WHOM THEY CAN ALSO TURN TO FOR REDRESS OF THEIR GRIEVANCES.

8. DISTRICT MAGISTRATES AND OTHER OFFICIALS MET ON THIS TRIP WERE FRIENDLY AND IN SOME CASES WILLING TO TALK AT LENGTH ABOUT THEIR ACTIVITIES IN THE DISTRICTS, BUT ALL SOUGHT TO CONVEY A ROSY PICTURE. LIEBOWITZ WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A JEEP-LOAD OF WEST BENGAL ARMED POLICE DURING ALL OF THE TRIP EXCEPT WHILE IN THE CALCUTTA SUBURBS. ONE LOCAL POLICE OFFICIAL SHOWED LIEBOWITZ A DIRECTIVE, PRESUMABLY FROM STATE GOVERNMENT, REQUIRING THE OFFICIAL TO ACCOMPANY LIEBOWITZ EVERYWHERE, EVEN ON SIGHTSEEING VISITS. THE AMOUNT OF POLICE "PROTECTION" WAS SOMEWHAT PUZZLING--OFTEN IN EXCESS OF WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN NECESSARY FOR SURVEILLANCE. WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE THAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN AN INDICATION THAT ALL IS NOT AS PEACEFUL IN RURAL WEST BENGAL AS OFFICIALS CLAIM IT IS, OR PERHAPS AN EFFORT TO INTIMIDATE THE LOCAL POPULATION AND KEEP ANYONE WITH A COMPLAINT AT A DISTANCE. KORN

UNQUOTE.
SAXBE

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